

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, April 9, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Spring Marketing Hints." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Getting your money's worth when you go marketing is one thing. And making the most of the foods you buy is another. Both are important in these economy times. We housewives need to know how to select our fresh fruits and vegetables, for example. And then we need to know how to keep them fresh at home and how to prepare them to make the most of their food value, flavor and general attractiveness.

Lots of us who can cook to the queen's taste aren't always wise buyers. But fortunately, the Department of Agriculture has some marketing specialists who can advise us on purchasing. One good general rule for getting your money's worth is: Buy fresh foods when they're in season. Of course, nowadays you and I can buy almost any food at any time -- strawberries in December, say, or asparagus in January. Our modern arrangements for rapid transportation and refrigeration make that possible. Out-of-season food is generally more expensive. And if it comes from a considerable distance, it rarely has the same fine flavor that food right out of the garden has.

Some of our most popular early spring offerings at the market include asparagus and greens of various kinds, and rhubarb and strawberries for the dessert course.

Of course, many people these days have gardens of their own to supply their tables with fresh fruits and vegetables. But for those of us who purchase them, the marketing specialists are ready with some helpful ideas for wise buying. Let's start with asparagus. How to get your money's worth when you buy asparagus? Well, here's a spring vegetable that ages rapidly after cutting. The tips spread on standing and the stalks become tough and woody. So if you want to avoid tough asparagus, the first thing to avoid is old asparagus. The younger and fresher the product, the more tender it will be. See if each stalk in the bunch is tender and firm with a close compact tip. A tender stalk is brittle -- breaks with a snap -- and is easily punctured. If the asparagus looks wilted or has a spreading tip, it has probably been cut for some time and will be tough except at the very tip. A good buy in asparagus is a bunch of stalks that are fairly plump in appearance, are six to ten inches long, are a deep green color from the tip almost to the base, and are very tender except for an inch or so at the base. Stalks showing a long stretch of white at the base will have a good deal of tough material. And stalks that are long and angular are likely to be tough and stringy.

There. So much for asparagus. What about greens? Nowadays most markets have some kind of fresh greens for sale almost the year around. I can mention offhand about 14 varieties that appear at one time of year or another -- beet and turnip tops, broccoli, chard, chicory, collards, cress, dandelions, endive, escarole,

kale, mustard, sorrell and spinach. The spring greens include dandelion greens, mustard greens, cress, beet and turnip tops. Well, in greens the best buy at this season or any other is fresh, young, crisp, and very tender. The tender, new leaves and stems are most delicious. Avoid seed stems. They're usually old and tough. Avoid flabby or wilted plants and leaves. And avoid leaves damaged by insects or those that show a good deal of sand or dirt. Who wants to pay for sand, and who wants to spend hours washing it off? Also avoid coarse stems or dry or yellowish leaves. If you buy greens with these defects, you're paying for waste goods. When you start preparing them for dinner, you may have to throw away over half your purchase.

So much for the vegetables in the market. Now a few pointers about rhubarb and strawberries. You can find two kinds of rhubarb in the market -- forced rhubarb which is shipped in from the Pacific Coast States or Michigan, and field-grown or garden rhubarb, grown locally. The local rhubarb is usually a dark rich red with coarse deep-green foliage, while forced rhubarb is pale pink with tender yellow-green foliage. Forced rhubarb appears on the market earlier in the spring than the local rhubarb.

Well, your best buy in rhubarb of either variety is a stalk that is fairly plump, is fresh, firm, crisp, tender and a red or pink color. Generally, a rich color indicates good flavor. Stale rhubarb has a wilted, flabby look and will probably be stringy and poor in flavor after cooking. And stalks that are allowed to grow too long before cutting are pithy, tough and stringy. Old rhubarb and stale rhubarb are both poor buys. You can test for tenderness and crispness by puncturing the stalk.

What about strawberries? Pick 'em by their looks, advise the specialists. Look for those that are clean, fresh-looking, and bright in color -- solid red all over, free from moisture, dirt or sand, and those that have their hulls attached. Small misshapen berries usually are poor in flavor and often have hard, green area. Overripe berries, or those that have stood too long, look dull and lusterless, are sometimes shrunken, and usually have moist, spoiled-looking spots. You buy waste when you buy old or overripe or damaged berries, no matter how cheap their price is.

If the basket or container holding strawberries is very stained, you can make a safe bet that the berries are soft or have been roughly handled. Strawberries minus their caps are usually a poor buy. And those that have mold showing on the outside are decaying.

Well, there are some hints to help the housewife get her money's worth. In general, you'll notice that all these early products are delicate in structure, are easily damaged, and age quickly on standing. The good buys are crisp, tender, and clear in color. As for greens, especially dandelion greens, take them young, tender and innocent.

But marketing wisely as we said before, is just half the story. Some day soon we'll continue with a chat on the best ways to prepare these spring foods for the table.

